

BANISHED

from
Bhutan

The story of how a small mountain kingdom
eliminated measles



**World Health
Organization**

Regional Office for South-East Asia

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**The story of how a small mountain kingdom
eliminated measles**

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arogyaparama labha

“Health is the highest gain.”

- *Buddha*

Taking these words to heart, every day Buddhist monks chant prayers for longevity and health (ayuarogyasampatti) to bestow blessings on the people. In Bhutan, this blessing has found many manifestations, but one of the most recent has been the elimination of measles from the country.

FOREWORD

Bhutan has shown us that when dedicated men and women come together under committed leadership, they can achieve their goals, surely and convincingly. Through visionary leadership and strategic planning, the country has built a fortress against measles, far in advance of the targets set in September 2013, when Member States of the South-East Asia Regional Committee, during the Sixty-sixth Meeting of the Committee, resolved to eliminate measles by 2020.

Bhutan is a country that measures success through the happiness of its people. Ensuring good health is, therefore, germane to its policy. Close to four decades ago, Bhutan, in collaboration with WHO, started its programme of immunization, with the introduction of MCV1 as part of the Expanded Programme on Immunization. As routine immunization has been strengthened and coverage expanded, the country has made remarkable gains not only in increasing the coverage of MCV1 and MCV2 to over 90% in most parts of the country but also in ensuring that surveillance and response are sharpened. Overcoming the challenges of dispersed habitations and mountainous terrain through the enthusiasm and efforts of its well-trained and hard-working health staff, Bhutan has not seen a case of endemic measles since 2012 and in April 2017, the WHO South-East Asia Verification Committee was convinced that endemic measles has been interrupted in the Kingdom, making it one of the first two countries of the Region to achieve this success.

Certainly, it is a time to celebrate and I extend my hearty congratulations to His Royal Highness King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and the people of Bhutan on this remarkable achievement.



Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh
Regional Director
WHO South-East Asia Region

Dzongkhags (districts)

20

Gewogs (blocks)

205

Population

757 042



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